

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY'S
ATOMIC ENERGY DEFENSE ACTIVITIES AND DEPARTMENT
OF DEFENSE NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAMS IN REVIEW OF
THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR
2027
AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM

Monday, April 20, 2026

Washington, D.C.

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1 TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S
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4 AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027
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6
7 Monday, April 20, 2026

8
9 U.S. Senate
10 Subcommittee on Strategic
11 Forces
12 Committee on Armed Services
13 Washington, D.C.

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15 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:33 p.m. in
16 Room SR-222, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Ded
17 Fischer, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

18 Committee Members Present: Senators Fischer
19 [presiding], and King.

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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DEB FISCHER, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM NEBRASKA

3 Senator Fischer: The hearing will come to order.
4 Welcome to our distinguished witnesses this afternoon, and
5 thank you for appearing before us today, and for your
6 testimony.

7 For the first time in our history, the United States
8 faces the challenge of simultaneously deterring two nuclear
9 peer adversaries. Russia and China continue to modernize
10 and diversify their nuclear forces, with China modernizing
11 at a breathtaking pace that has consistently exceeded our
12 estimates for years.

13 This committee has heard from the Department of Energy
14 and Defense that our own nuclear modernization efforts are
15 the number one priority. However, that rhetoric has too
16 often failed to be backed up by action. This was the
17 primary reason that this subcommittee pressed for the
18 creation of a new assistant secretary of defense for nuclear
19 matters, who would be responsible for both nuclear policy
20 and nuclear programs, and I am pleased to have Dr. Kadlec
21 with us today to discuss this new role.

22 Thankfully, the Departments of Energy and Defense are
23 starting to turn the corner and are making substantive
24 progress with nuclear modernization. Today, we welcome two
25 panels of witnesses. Our first panel, we have Dr. David



1 Beck from the National Nuclear Security Administration, Mr.
2 Timothy Walsh from the Department of Energy, and Admiral
3 William Houston from the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program.
4 I am pleased to see that the President's fiscal year 2017
5 budget request includes a significant increase in funding
6 for NNSA, in particular, the Weapons Activities Account.
7 These additional resources will be critical to supporting
8 weapons modernization programs, planning for future systems,
9 and recapitalizing our nuclear enterprise.

10 On our second panel, we have General Dale White, the
11 Air Force direct reporting program manager for critical
12 major weapons systems. General Stephen Davis from Air Force
13 Global Strike Command, Vice Admiral Johnny Wolfe from Naval
14 Strategic Systems Program, and as I mentioned earlier, the
15 Honorable Robert Kadlec, assistant secretary for nuclear
16 deterrence, chemical, and biological defense policy and
17 programs.

18 I look forward to hearing the testimony from our
19 witnesses today, and I appreciate your efforts to move
20 nuclear modernization forward. With that, Senator King, you
21 were recognized for any remarks.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. ANGUS KING, U.S. SENATOR FROM MAINE

2 Senator King: Thank you. First, I want to thank our
3 witnesses today for joining us. This is an annual Strategic
4 Forces Subcommittee hearing in preparation for our National
5 Defense Authorization Bill later this spring.

6 There's so much to be discussed. I'm going to keep my
7 comments pretty short. First, I want to acknowledge that
8 this is Vice Admiral Wolfe's last formal appearance before
9 this subcommittee. I'm sure he's terribly sad about that
10 milestone --

11 [Laughter.]

12 Senator King: -- but he's been the director of the
13 Navy's Strategic Systems Program since 2018. 8 years. You
14 have been responsible, Admiral Wolfe, for the cradle-to-
15 grave development of the Navy's fleet ballistic missile
16 program. You've been a friend and truly a trusted advisor
17 to this subcommittee, and I want to thank you and
18 acknowledge 38 years of service. I look forward to
19 hopefully promptly working with your replacement given the
20 tremendous responsibility that this program entails.

21 This is a unique hearing in that it combines the
22 defense nuclear programs at the Department of Energy with
23 those of the Department of Defense. The NNSA is the busiest
24 since it's been in the 1980s in meeting Department of
25 Defense requirements, while at the same time modernizing

1 Manhattan-era production facilities. And I've been to some
2 of those facilities, and I can honestly say there are some
3 of the fewer -- there are few facilities in our government
4 that are older than I am, and those meet that criteria.

5 Likewise, the Department of Defense is conducting a
6 once-in-a-generation modernization of our triad. Once in
7 several generations, I would say, at the same time, ensuring
8 the existing triad of ICBM submarines and bombers can remain
9 safe, secure, and effective as the bedrock of our national
10 defense deterrence policy with two near-peer adversaries,
11 Russia and China.

12 I will want to know what issues you face in maintaining
13 the existing delivery systems, many dating to the 1960s,
14 while like NNSA conducting a multi-decade long modernization
15 of our ICBMs, bombers, and ballistic missile submarines. I
16 just came from an intelligence briefing, and without
17 revealing a thing that's classified, I can say that the
18 Chinese concentration and acceleration of their nuclear
19 armament effort is something to be taken extremely seriously
20 and only reminds us of the importance of deterrence, which,
21 as I said, is the mainstay, the cornerstone of our defense
22 strategy. It's worked for 75, 80 years, and it's something
23 that must be maintained. It is our best way to keep the
24 peace.

25 Mr. Walsh, I haven't forgotten you. You've one of the



1 most complicated programs of all in cleaning up a former
2 nuclear weapon production sites. At Hanford alone, there
3 are 55 million gallons of nuclear waste, 177 storage tanks
4 near the Columbia River. I want to know how you are
5 proceeding on this effort.

6 Again, I appreciate our witnesses joining us and look
7 forward to the testimony. Thank you.

8 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Senator King. At this
9 time, I'd like to recognize the members of the panel for
10 their opening statements. Mr. Beck, you're recognized.

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1 STATEMENT OF HONORABLE DAVID E. BECK, DEPUTY
2 ADMINISTRATOR FOR DEFENSE PROGRAMS, NATIONAL NUCLEAR
3 SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

4 Mr. Beck: Thank you, Chairwoman Fischer, Ranking
5 Member King, thank you for the opportunity to testify before
6 you today with my esteemed colleagues.

7 America's nuclear deterrent is the ultimate guarantor
8 of our freedom and the final backstop against aggression.
9 Today, the stability that deterrent provides is under direct
10 and accelerating threat. Russia and China are engaged in an
11 unprecedented nuclear build up that is rapidly eroding
12 America's strategic advantage, but under President Trump
13 leadership, NNSA is responding with urgency, agility, and
14 determination to strengthen deterrence.

15 Our top priority is clear modernization of nuclear
16 stockpile to meet the U.S. nuclear deterrence objectives.
17 We are executing the full program of record ahead of current
18 schedules. We are exercising the capability to rapidly
19 prototype new weapons. We are surging production of
20 plutonium pits, uranium components, high explosives, and
21 other critical materials, and we are enhancing our critical
22 skills workforce while rebuilding the aging infrastructure
23 that underpins our entire enterprise faster, smarter, and at
24 lower cost.

25 To drive these results, the Office of Defense Programs

1 has issued sweeping transformation objectives to our
2 laboratories, plants, and sites in addition to our extensive
3 baseline program, these are not incremental tweaks. They
4 are fundamental shifts in culture, technical execution,
5 management processes, and accountability. We are demanding
6 results from ourselves and our partners across the
7 enterprise.

8 Over the next 3 years, these changes will deliver some
9 of the NNSA's most significant achievements in decades;
10 warheads for new delivery systems delivered ahead of
11 schedule, demonstration of next-generation hard and deeply
12 buried target defeat capabilities, unprecedented confidence
13 in the reliability of our aging stockpile, disciplined,
14 timely production restored across the complex infrastructure
15 projects completed faster and cheaper, 100 plutonium pits
16 manufactured for the future stockpile.

17 We are overhauling the way NNSA executes capital
18 construction. We are placing the right leaders in charge,
19 aligning authority with accountability, transparently
20 measuring progress, adopting commercial best practices,
21 streamlining acquisition, accepting prudent risk, and
22 cutting through overly burdensome regulations. The goal is
23 simple, to deliver critical projects on time and on budget
24 to support the deterrence mission.

25 We are already seeing major progress. Weapons programs



1 are ahead of schedule, and the NNSA continues to deliver on
2 time to the Department of War. Pit production at Los Alamos
3 has surged significantly in fiscal year 2026. The LAP4
4 project at Los Alamos realized 300 percent efficiency over
5 prior 3-year average performance. The uranium processing
6 facility is nearly complete, with first castings now planned
7 for 2028, and overall commissioning accelerated. Rapid
8 capability prototypes are being executed. Tritium
9 production continues to ramp up and enabling more agile
10 stockpile options. The lithium production facility
11 acquisition strategy has been overhauled for modular
12 commercial speed construction.

13 Maintaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear
14 deterrent is not just important, as the United States most
15 urgent national security imperative. Working closely with
16 the Department of War, the NNSA will deliver. The
17 significant budget increases NNSA has received highlights
18 the growing requirements of deterrence. With this fiscal
19 year 2027 budget request, we are asking the Congress to make
20 further investments needed to deliver peace through atomic
21 strength, against determined adversaries who respect only
22 capability and resolve.

23 Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you
24 today. I look forward to your questions.

25 [The prepared statement of Mr. Beck follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Beck. Welcome,
2 Secretary Walsh, you are recognized for your opening
3 statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF HONORABLE TIMOTHY J. WALSH, ASSISTANT
2 SECRETARY FOR THE OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT,
3 DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

4 Mr. Walsh: Chairwoman Fischer, Ranking Member King,
5 thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today as the
6 head of Department of Energy's Office of Environmental
7 Management. As an Army veteran, I'm grateful for your
8 dedication to our Nation's security and the vital work you
9 do.

10 With President Trump's fiscal year 2027 budget, our
11 mission is clear: we are putting Americans first by cleaning
12 up environmental legacy sites and protecting our
13 communities. Our focus is on transforming former nuclear
14 sites into centers for advanced energy and innovation,
15 helping drive down electricity costs and create new
16 opportunities.

17 Environmental Management supports the Department of
18 Energy's three core pillars. First, we work with NNSA and
19 Naval Reactors to clean up legacy nuclear waste sites and
20 make room for new national security missions. Second, we
21 clear space for cutting edge research at our national labs.
22 Third, we champion energy dominance and reindustrialization,
23 leading to job creation and strengthening our national
24 security.

25 We are delivering results rapidly by accelerating



1 cleanup, restoring sites, and revitalizing local economies.
2 Our 2040 vision is to turn major legacy sites into hubs for
3 nuclear energy, advanced manufacturing, and AI
4 infrastructure, saving time and billions of dollars on our
5 cleanup mission. By leveraging risk-based approach and AI,
6 we are finding the best technical solutions to speed up
7 cleanup and reduce risks.

8 Affordable, reliable energy is essential for our
9 prosperity. At Oak Ridge, Tennessee, cleaned land now
10 supports uranium enrichment, fuel fabrication, and
11 development of small modular reactors, creating jobs and
12 solutions for America's energy needs. In South Carolina,
13 the Savannah River site is restarting H Canyon to reprocess
14 used nuclear fuel and plutonium for advanced nuclear
15 reactors, saving the taxpayers \$350 million. In Nevada and
16 Idaho, our cleanup and facility upgrades support nuclear
17 development and national security priorities.

18 Our core commitment remains to protect people and the
19 environment. With cleanup completed at 92 sites. We are
20 focused on the remaining 14 sites. The 2027 budget shows
21 our strong commitment to safely advancing our mission.
22 Turning liabilities into opportunities for security, energy,
23 and jobs. Thanks to congressional support and industry
24 partnerships, we are addressing the impacts of past nuclear
25 programs, and evolving to be a results-driven organization



1 that prioritizes, environmental protection and public
2 health.

3 Our work lays the foundation for safer, cleaner, and
4 more prosperous communities nationwide. We look forward to
5 working with Congress to advance our progress, strengthen
6 national security, and support affordable American energy.
7 Thank you for your service to our Nation. God bless our
8 military, and God bless America.

9 [The prepared statement of Mr. Walsh follows:]

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1 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Admiral
2 Houston, welcome. Good to see you. You are recognized for
3 your opening comments.

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1 STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL WILLIAM J. HOUSTON, USN,
2 DIRECTOR, NAVAL NUCLEAR PROPULSION PROGRAM, NATIONAL NUCLEAR
3 SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

4 Admiral Houston: Chairwoman Fischer, Ranking Member
5 King, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you
6 for the opportunity to testify today. Your continued
7 support for the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program is
8 essential to the maritime dominance delivered by the United
9 States Navy nuclear powered submarines and aircraft
10 carriers.

11 Every day, nuclear power warships are conducting
12 operations and demanding environment. They operate with
13 forceful backup Naval Reactors, technical experience, robust
14 infrastructure, and an unrelenting pursuit of improving our
15 edge maritime operations with today's nuclear fleets are the
16 results of decades of investment in research and development
17 of materials, refined procedures, and adherence to the
18 highest standards.

19 As I have in past testimony, I want to assure you that
20 the funding request before you is a result of a rigorous and
21 demanding look at our current and future operations that
22 provide the Nation with its unmatched capability. This
23 year, Naval Reactors will prioritize three carrier. Three
24 key areas and two priority projects. First, our people.
25 The people within the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Enterprise

1 are essential to the management and oversight of important
2 work we perform for our Nation. Second, we continue our
3 intense focus on research and development of technologies
4 that reduce overall cost savings, shorten construction
5 timelines, and consistently enhance fleet capabilities.
6 Finally, we'll modernize and sustain the critical
7 infrastructure throughout our dedicated DOE laboratories.

8 I'm also seeking your continued support for two
9 national priority projects. The first is finalizing
10 development in fiscal year 2027 of the Columbia-class
11 ballistic missile submarine reactor plant. The life of the
12 ship core, now entering serial production, is directly
13 supporting the Navy's number one acquisition priority and a
14 key strategic asset.

15 And the second project is the construction of the Naval
16 Spent Fuel Handling Facility in Idaho, which will bring
17 long-term, reliable processing of spent fuel from the Navy's
18 nuclear fleet well into the second half of this century. We
19 continue to experience challenges with this project, but
20 I've been to site multiple times in the past year and
21 progress is visible.

22 In closing, your strong and enduring support enables
23 Naval Reactors to succeed and continue to excel in every
24 pursuit. I respectfully urge your continued support across
25 our efforts this year. Thank you.



1 [The prepared statement of Admiral Houston follows:]

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23 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Admiral, for your
24 comments.

25 Mr. Beck, I'd like to begin with a few questions for



1 you. The fiscal year 2027 budget request for weapons
2 activities includes roughly 13 percent increase compared to
3 last year when we factor in the reconciliation funding. Can
4 you explain to this committee and to the public why such an
5 increase is necessary?

6 Mr. Beck: Senator, thank you for the question. We
7 have a unique situation worldwide with our adversaries. We
8 currently have seven stockpile modernization efforts
9 underway. We just completed two, and I'll refer to my notes
10 to make sure I get this exactly right. The 88370 was
11 finished. The 61-12 was completed. The 61-13 FPU was
12 completed, the first production unit. 80-4, 80-5, 87-1 and
13 93, plus two phase 1s are underway.

14 We also have a number of significant construction
15 projects that are that are moving into construction. Some
16 are nearly complete, but others are just beginning. That is
17 a very heavy lift because we did not -- have not modernized
18 our stockpile infrastructure for quite some time,
19 particularly focused on plutonium, uranium, lithium.

20 Senator Fischer: Thank you. And, as you know, in the
21 fiscal year 2026 NDAA that formally established a Rapid
22 Capabilities Program within the NNSA, many of us are
23 concerned about the time that all of this is taking. So,
24 can you tell me how are these Rapid Capability teams
25 enhancing NNSA's ability to quickly address emerging mission

1 needs, and do so without disrupting some of the current
2 modernization programs that are already underway?

3 Mr. Beck: Senator, thank you for that question. The
4 Rapid Capabilities effort is well underway. We're working
5 very closely with the Department of War. We've recently had
6 a meeting at STRATCOM to prioritize what was needed for the
7 warfighter. We are working on prototypes to support that
8 and conceptual designs at this point, and it is actually
9 helping us move forward with greater speed and urgency.
10 We're using some of the skills that we've developed over the
11 last several years to do so, and we have a dedicated small
12 team working on providing the infrastructure and the
13 preliminary hardware that's needed for these efforts. So,
14 it's very encouraging and going quite well.

15 Senator Fischer: You're with NNSA, with the Department
16 of Energy. You just mentioned working with the Department
17 of War, working with STRATCOM. How are those relationships?
18 Is there open dialogue, good cooperation, a seamless
19 transfer of information so that we can see things move
20 faster.

21 Mr. Beck: Senator. Yes, exactly that. I've worked
22 very closely with Dr. Kadlec. I worked very closely with
23 Admiral Correll at STRATCOM. And we have an agreement where
24 there are no surprises, that we're going to be open and
25 transparent with each other, and that's been executed quite



1 well with them and their staffs, and the relationship is
2 quite good. I've been very happy with how that has worked
3 out. So, thank you for that question.

4 Senator Fischer: And pit production, as we're looking
5 at Los Alamos, how are you going to ramp up pit production
6 there until Savannah River is ready? Tell us a little bit
7 about that.

8 Mr. Beck: Within a week of having been sworn in, I
9 went to Los Alamos, and we brainstormed ideas with experts
10 across the complex, and particularly the Los Alamos
11 leadership, and we came up with hundreds of ideas. A couple
12 of dozens of them really moved the needle on how to expedite
13 pits.

14 We are positioned now to where what we thought we were
15 going to build in this fiscal year. We'll significantly
16 increase that number. We built those in the first half of
17 the year. We have found some small -- well, significant
18 things that we could do that to expedite production. We're
19 reducing retention or improving retention at an attrition of
20 the workforce through some actions that we've made on
21 compensation, and we've also made some changes in regulatory
22 environment there. So, we're seeing dramatic increases in
23 the pit production rates, and we expect that to continue for
24 the years ahead.

25 Senator Fischer: In this setting, can you tell us just



1 exactly where you are with pit production and what was the
2 requirement, I always call it the hopeful requirement, and
3 where we are now.

4 Mr. Beck: Our requirement by law is to make 80 pits a
5 year by 2030, and we have set a goal to make 100
6 collectively through December of 2028. Which means that in
7 order to get there from here, we will have made between 30
8 and 50 pits per year. We're moving closer to the objective.
9 While it's a very big stretch to get to 80 a year, we have a
10 chance to do so now, and we're demonstrating that the
11 capability, and the yield, and the process, which I monitor
12 monthly with metrics, is moving forward quite nicely. And
13 we have the whole complex of tension. We've worked with
14 Savannah River and Los Alamos and a number of other members
15 of the of the enterprise to expedite pit production. It's
16 going quite well, I'm happy to report.

17 Senator Fischer: Thank you. Senator King.

18 Senator King: Thank you.

19 Mr. Beck, the NNSA and the National Labs are the
20 national repository for knowledge about nuclear weapons and
21 nuclear -- all matters nuclear. I was wondering if there
22 are any NNSA personnel or personnel from any of the National
23 Labs in Islamabad this week to advise our negotiators on the
24 issue of Iran's nuclear capability.

25 Mr. Beck: Senator, thank you for the question. I

1 don't know the answer to that question. I'll get back to
2 you.

3 [The information referred to follows:]

4 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator King: I'd appreciate it. I think that's
2 something that -- well, frankly, I think it's something you
3 should know. It's hard for me to imagine that people from
4 your department were detailed to these negotiations, and you
5 wouldn't know about it, but I will look forward to your
6 response. The reconciliation plan last summer appropriated
7 \$3.1 billion to NNSA. We're still waiting for a spend plan.
8 Could we have that, please?

9 Mr. Beck: Could I ask, 3.1 billion for which --

10 Senator King: That was under the One Big Beautiful
11 Bill Act, \$3.1 billion to an NNSA, and I just we would like
12 to see what the what the plan is for allocating those funds.

13 Mr. Beck: Senator, we have a plan for that. I -- we
14 have delivered it in part. I don't know that we've given
15 the complete plan to you, because there's been some
16 questions about allocation with respect to the letter of
17 intent involved with that. We are working with your staff
18 to finalize that. And as soon as we have that, we'll
19 provide that to you, I suspect, within the next 30 days.

20 [The information referred to follows:]

21 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator King: I appreciate that. Thank you.

2 Mr. Walsh, I understand you've finally been able to
3 operate the plant that takes low level waste, turns it into
4 glass. Is that in actual operation? Is it working?

5 Mr. Walsh: It is, but a plant that was 25 years in the
6 making and cost almost \$18 billion to date, which is a
7 remarkable amount of money. Is starting up finally and
8 working through the kinks to get to a full operational
9 capacity, which we think may take up to another year. So,
10 we're currently pursuing a glass plus grout approach, very
11 similar to --

12 Senator King: That's why I was going to ask sort of a
13 follow up that's less expensive, is that proving out?

14 Mr. Walsh: It is, and we did last year a testbed
15 initiative to prove it, and it's not a novel technology.
16 We've been doing it across the complex and specifically at
17 Savannah River for the last 10 years, and ramped up that
18 production now to where we're treating about 9 million
19 gallons of tank waste a year at Savannah River.

20 We're hoping that in this next year, we'll get through
21 the Department of Ecology. We've been having good meetings
22 with that. There was a lot of relationship building that we
23 had to do there. And more importantly, it's about
24 leadership, it's about setting expectations, and outcomes,
25 and starting to move with a real sense of urgency at hand.

1 Senator King: So, are you bullish on this grout
2 approach?

3 Mr. Walsh: I'm very bullish on it.

4 Senator King: Thank you.

5 Oak Ridge Y-12 site is being is being rebuilt. It's a
6 very large facility, 500,000 square feet. Is that -- what's
7 the status of that asset? Is that being -- is that going to
8 be taken down? That's a lot of space that could be used at
9 Oak Ridge.

10 Mr. Walsh: It is. We just completed Alpha 2, which
11 was one of the key buildings there, taken down, and we're in
12 the process of going through decontamination and
13 decommissioning of the next series of buildings that will be
14 taken down in a similar fashion.

15 Senator King: Thank you.

16 Admiral, we haven't made uranium fuel. We haven't made
17 fuel for nuclear submarines since 1992, but is it -- my
18 first question is, is it now necessary to begin that process
19 again, given the expansion of the of the submarine fleet,
20 the aircraft carriers, and also AUKUS? What what's the
21 status? Where do we stand on fuel for these nuclear
22 propulsion plants?

23 Admiral Houston: Yes. Ranking Member King, thank you
24 for that question. So, our highly enriched uranium is out
25 into the 2050s. Our supply will last us at our current



1 plan. We do need to develop a plan. We are working very
2 closely with and NNSA and NA-10 to develop that. We have
3 some pilot programs that NA-10 can talk about further, if
4 you want, but it's absolutely critical that we do start
5 working on the development of enrichment capability. That
6 will first be for the weapons program, and then it will be
7 for our program and absolutely critical. AUKUS, as far as
8 enrichment, we need for AUKUS -- it is a very minor, we're
9 talking months, we're to shift our window. It's not a large
10 impact on our program, and that is -- those figures I quote
11 you for the 2050s is based on our current, which is one,
12 plus two, plus our carrier build program.

13 Senator King: So, you would characterize the fuel
14 situation as serious, but not critical at this moment, but
15 we need to begin the process to be sure that we don't have a
16 gap. Is that a fair summary?

17 Admiral Houston: That is absolutely correct, Senator.
18 And if you look at the --

19 Senator King: Ensure the record shows absolutely
20 correct, Senator.

21 [Laughter.]

22 Senator King: That's a phrase we -- but go ahead, go
23 ahead.

24 Admiral Houston: And I would add that that's part of
25 the NASA blueprint to develop that. And that's where we've



1 put some of the larger projects that we have to ensure that
2 it's cost conscious across some of the major projects that
3 NASA has to execute.

4 Senator King: Thank you.

5 Admiral Houston: Yes, sir.

6 Senator King: Madam Chair.

7 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Senator King. We'll ask a
8 couple more questions while we wait to see if other members
9 are going to come to the hearing.

10 Admiral, when we think of AUKUS, and really the big
11 undertaking and the important undertaking that we see with
12 AUKUS, and your part in that implementation, what sometimes
13 people say, why are we doing this? So, what's in it for the
14 United States? What are the Australians providing to us and
15 how would you respond to that?

16 Admiral Houston: Yes. Thank you for the question,
17 Senator. It's a tremendous ally. It's a key partner in the
18 Western Pacific for us, key partners since every conflict
19 since the middle of World War I. Close and trusted. Very
20 close maritime relationship. I actually qualified in an
21 Australian submarine for command. Those very close
22 relationships. They share a heavyweight torpedo. They
23 share a combat system, the submarine rotational forces west.
24 The first phase of AUKUS will include rotational basing in
25 Stirling, their west coast naval base. We are on track of



1 that to be executed in the 2027, 2028 timeframe. They've
2 made great progress, and then it's condition-based for them,
3 sovereign-ready for us to sell them Virginia-class
4 submarines.

5 The Australians have performed exceptionally well in
6 our training pipeline. Their sailors are on more than half
7 of our fast attack submarines in the Western Pacific right
8 now, performing superbly and contributing to us. They've
9 contributed tremendous amounts, \$2 billion, to our submarine
10 industrial base, and from my program alone, that's over \$600
11 million to expand our infrastructure, and help with American
12 jobs and help drive for completion of our nuclear
13 enterprise, our naval nuclear propulsion program. So, an
14 absolutely key partner, Senator.

15 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Admiral.

16 Mr. Secretary, when you were talking about the number
17 of sites that have already been cleaned up, and you
18 mentioned there were 14 left, what most concerns you about
19 those sites, and are you confident that you will be able to
20 remediate them?

21 Mr. Walsh: You know, our biggest challenge right now
22 is Hanford, obviously. It represents 40 percent of our
23 budget, and I feel like we haven't had clear direction, and
24 leadership, and alignment out there. But under my
25 leadership and the team we have in place now, I'm confident



1 that we're going to finally tackle the tank waste mission
2 out there. I feel like this is really our breakout year.
3 We're making great progress on taking down old gaseous
4 diffusion plants at Portsmouth and Paducah, just like we did
5 at K-25 in Oak Ridge. Progress is going really well in
6 Savannah River.

7 One of the critical aspects to NNSA's mission, and our
8 completion mission really, is keeping whip up and running
9 and operational. Some of the infrastructure there is
10 vintage, but still operational, and we're repairing that and
11 we're just coming out of a shutdown. Last year, we upgraded
12 our HVAC system for that. We have plenty of capacity to go,
13 but that is a critical aspect of our cleanup mission that
14 will stay focused on.

15 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

16 And Mr. Beck and on NNSA's Enterprise Blueprint concept
17 that's shaping the long-range planning for modernization for
18 our critical infrastructure, how's that going? Are you
19 you're new to this position, in this administration, and you
20 look at that, what are your feelings about it?

21 Mr. Beck: Well, the Enterprise Blueprint is a very
22 good business tool to project modernization efforts over the
23 next 25 years. I'm personally a little frustrated that it's
24 not fast enough and costs too much. So, we're working, as I
25 mentioned in my earlier remarks, working to fix that problem



1 of speed things up using commercial standards where possible
2 and try to provide things at lower cost.

3 We plan to have that updated within the next few
4 months, and we'll provide you status as we move forward.
5 We've already made significant progress on LAP4, and the
6 uranium processing facility, and lithium processing
7 facility, and we will be able to provide that update with
8 the Enterprise Blueprint tool that we have.

9 Senator Fischer: How would you define success? Is
10 that being able to go faster at lower cost?

11 Mr. Beck: The success is --

12 Senator Fischer: Is that part of that?

13 Mr. Beck: The success is to provide the warfighter and
14 Department of War what they need, when they need it --

15 Senator Fischer: Exactly.

16 Mr. Beck: -- and we have not yet done that, and we
17 plan to do so. We have the antiquated facilities that are
18 in many cases that are still providing the materials that
19 are needed, but they're they have significant risk with
20 them, and we try to -- we want to reduce that risk and give
21 the warfighter what's needed when they need it.

22 Senator Fischer: Thank you sir. Senator King.

23 Senator King: Thank you. Mr. Beck, I'd like to just
24 follow-up on my question. If you could check in the next 24
25 hours as to whether or not there are NNSA or National Lab



1 people advising our negotiators in Islamabad and get us the
2 answer to that before the close of business tomorrow, I'd
3 appreciate it. That's a pretty straightforward question.

4 Mr. Beck: That's a function handled by NA-20, the Non-
5 Proliferation Office, and I know that there -- I checked, we
6 have people advising the people in there, but I don't
7 believe we have anyone there, but I will check and verify
8 that for you within 24 hours.

9 Senator King: I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

10 I know we've talked a little bit about Savannah River.
11 Can you give us a progress report and, and timing how we
12 expect that? You've talked about pits at Los Alamos. Are
13 we making progress converting the MOX Facility. That's been
14 that's been one of those projects that seems to always move
15 out into the future.

16 Mr. Beck: Yes, Senator, it is. And I've been to
17 Savannah River twice in the first 3 months of -- on the job
18 here, and have toured the MOX Facility, and looked hard at
19 how we approach that. The first step was to go to Savannah
20 River and, and brainstorm how Savannah River could help Los
21 Alamos make pits now. The next step will be to go forward
22 and try to figure out how to get this, the Savannah River
23 Plutonium Processing Facility done faster. Right now, it's
24 projected to produce pits in 2035, full rate production
25 beyond.



1 Senator King: Eisenhower retook Europe in 11 months.

2 Mr. Beck: Yes, sir.

3 Senator King: 2034.

4 Mr. Beck: Our intent is to dramatically improve the
5 timeline on that facility by changing, The strategy and
6 perhaps some of the leadership involved.

7 Senator King: We'll look forward to updates on that.

8 Admiral, I understand we're moving away in our training
9 on the nuclear -- in the nuclear Navy from actual units to
10 simulators. Is that happening, and can you discuss that?
11 Is that going to improve, and make training more effective
12 and faster?

13 Admiral Houston: Senator, that is correct. We operate
14 prototypes right now, which are full scale submarines
15 generally with actual reactors that we run. I would say
16 that it's -- simulators doesn't do it credit. There are
17 full-scale models of submarines and their engine room, and
18 we operate them -- and it's not with the actual reactor, but
19 the full-scale size and replica is so accurate that if I
20 took an operator on there, they may not understand whether
21 they're on an actual submarine or an actual training
22 platform.

23 The valves operate the same way. They -- if you have
24 steam come out of a valve, they'll actually be steam coming
25 out of this full-scale replica. And we are pursuing these.



1 The first propulsion plant team trainer will go into
2 operation in 2035. We've completed the design on it. We
3 already operate these at our prototype training sites to
4 supplement our training already, and we will have three more
5 built, and they're all going to be built in Charleston.
6 They will give us better training than what we can get with
7 our prototypes right now. They will be higher up time, and
8 they will actually increase our throughput significantly.

9 Senator King: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thanks
10 for that initiative. Thank you, Madam Chair.

11 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Senator King. Thank you,
12 gentlemen. I appreciate you being here today. If we have
13 questions for the record, we will get those to you, and then
14 you'll have a short time period to get the answers back to
15 us.

16 [The information referred to follows:]

17 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Fischer: But thank you, again. Appreciate it.
2 And with that, I would welcome up our panel number 2,
3 please.

4 [Pause.]

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1 Senator Fischer: I'd like to welcome the members of
2 our second panel at the hearing today. We have Secretary
3 Robert Kadlec, who is the assistant secretary of defense for
4 nuclear deterrence, chemical, and biological defense policy
5 and programs. General Dale White, with the United States
6 Air Force director, critical major weapons systems,
7 Department of the Air Force. General Steven Davis, United
8 States Air Force, commander, Air Force, Global Strike
9 Command, and Vice Admiral Johnny Wolfe, junior United States
10 Navy director for strategic systems programs, Department of
11 the Navy.

12 Welcome to all of you. Let's begin with your opening
13 statements. Secretary Kadlec, we will begin with you.

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1 STATEMENT OF HONORABLE ROBERT P. KADLEC, ASSISTANT
2 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR NUCLEAR DETERRENCE, CHEMICAL, AND
3 BIOLOGICAL DEFENSE POLICY AND PROGRAMS

4 Dr. Kadlec: Thank you very much, Chair Fischer and
5 Ranking Member King. Thank you for the opportunity to
6 testify before you today regarding U.S. nuclear forces.

7 I appear before you with a message that is stark and
8 sobering, as you kind of alluded to during your opening
9 statement. For the first time in our Nation's history, we
10 will face the challenge of deterring two nuclear powers
11 China and Russia simultaneously, as well as regional powers
12 with growing capabilities.

13 This is not a hypothetical future problem. This is a
14 now crisis. China is engaged in a breathtaking and opaque
15 expansion of its nuclear arsenal, while Russia, with the
16 world's largest Arsenal, continues to modernize its forces
17 into integrating new kinds of nuclear weapons into its
18 strategy for coercion. Both adversaries have sophisticated
19 theater nuclear weapons, significantly outnumbering the U.S.
20 Add to this challenge is North Korea, whose missiles now can
21 reach the American homeland. The picture becomes alarmingly
22 clear; we're in a new and more dangerous era.

23 The 2020 Strategic Posture Commission highlighted the
24 inefficiencies and risks we've allowed to fester in our
25 nuclear enterprise. For too long, we've operated under a



1 business-as-usual model that reflected a benign security
2 environment. Programs were delayed, hard decisions
3 deferred, and taking risks were avoided. Now, we must flip
4 that model. We have to act with urgency while we take steps
5 to accept risk appropriately, to confront these challenges.

6 Through the modernization and diversification of U.S.
7 nuclear forces and the recapitalization of our NC3
8 capabilities, the President's fiscal year 2027 budget
9 request priority prioritizes the nuclear deterrent as the
10 foundation of America's defense, approximately 5.5 percent
11 of the total budget. The modernization and diversification
12 of our nuclear deterrent, our submarines, our missiles, our
13 bombers, and NC3 is not a choice, but an imperative. As
14 Secretary Hegseth said recently, "Nothing else matters if we
15 don't get this right."

16 We must accelerate these critical programs wherever
17 possible to deliver the next-generation capabilities to the
18 warfighter as soon as possible. We must also accelerate
19 SLCM-N, and develop additional theater nuclear forces. Such
20 capabilities are essential to managing escalation and
21 ensuring the United States is never subject to blackmail.
22 Finally, we must supercharge our defense industrial base,
23 Returning to the U.S. to world's premiere arsenal, capable
24 of producing a scale and speed with unmatched quality.

25 The cost of investing in our nuclear forces and



1 supporting capabilities and infrastructure is significant.
2 However, the cost of failure is a world where the risk of
3 miscalculation, catastrophic conflict is unacceptably high.
4 That is a price we cannot afford to pay. We owe it to the
5 warfighter, to the American people, and our posterity to
6 ensure that our freedom remains -- that our arsenal of
7 freedom remains ready, reliable, and resolute. The time to
8 act is now.

9 Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

10 [The prepared statement of Dr. Kadlec follows:]

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1 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

2 General White, welcome. We would welcome your comments
3 at this time. Thank you.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL DALE R. WHITE, USAF, DIRECTOR,
2 CRITICAL MAJOR WEAPON SYSTEMS, DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

3 General White: Chairwoman Fischer, Ranking Member
4 King, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, on
5 behalf of the Secretary of War, Honorable Pete Hegseth, and
6 the Deputy Secretary of War, the Honorable Steve Feinberg, I
7 thank you for the opportunity to testify on the vital work
8 of the Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Critical Major
9 Weapon Systems.

10 The office was established by Secretary Hegseth to
11 provide urgent, unified focus on a select group of weapons
12 systems critical to the Nation's defense. These programs;
13 Sentinel ICBM, Minuteman III ICBM, B-21 Raider family of
14 systems, F-47 family of systems, and VC-25B, require a
15 higher level of leadership and operational urgency to ensure
16 their timely delivery and execution in alignment with the
17 National Defense Strategy. The role is twofold; to
18 relentlessly prioritize the program's most consequential to
19 the security and prosperity of the American people, and to
20 drive the transformation of the acquisition process to equip
21 the U.S. military with the world's most decisive and lethal
22 warfighting capabilities.

23 Success depends on outcomes-focused culture that
24 delivers capabilities to the warfighter at the speed of
25 relevance, and this requires an accelerated pace and a

1 transparent partnership with the industrial base. The core
2 purpose of the Critical Major Weapon Systems is to enable
3 warfighters by delivering decisive capability at the speed
4 of relevance. My mission is guided by three golden rules;
5 empowered execution, integration over independence, and a
6 revitalized relationship with the industrial base.

7 Empowered Execution: Program executive offices are
8 fully empowered to execute with urgency under the concept.
9 My role is to serve as their strategic champion, leveraging
10 my authority to resolve complex cross-departmental
11 challenges, and dismantle bureaucratic obstacles in the
12 process. Integration over independence: I function as the
13 direct milestone decision authority for this portfolio,
14 ensuring frictionless and absolute integration with the
15 Department of the Air Force and other stakeholders. This
16 streamlined structure and deliberately avoids replicating
17 traditional oversight layers to accelerate decision making.

18 A revitalized industrial partnership: We're
19 instituting a new paradigm of partnership with industry,
20 moving beyond a transactional relationship to one built on
21 transparency, collaboration, and shared accountability. We
22 expect our industrial industry partners to embrace modular
23 open system architectures to foster innovation, create
24 opportunities for emerging companies, and deliver superior
25 performance at a lower cost.



1 This portfolio directly underpins the 2026 National
2 Defense Strategy, and contains the critical capabilities
3 that serve as the ultimate guarantor of our national
4 sovereignty. As the NDS unequivocally states, the United
5 States should never, will never be left vulnerable to
6 nuclear blackmail. Two of the programs, B-21 and Sentinel,
7 are dedicated to modernizing nuclear surety, while a third,
8 Minuteman III, is focused on sustaining it until the
9 replacement is fielded.

10 Defending the U.S. homeland is the bedrock of homeland
11 defense is a robust and modern nuclear deterrent. With both
12 China and Russia aggressively modernizing their nuclear
13 forces, it is an absolute imperative that U.S. modernization
14 programs proceed with urgency. The B-21 Raider and LGM-35
15 Sentinel are the essential guarantors of credible U.S.
16 nuclear deterrent for future generations. Investment
17 continues to sing the LGM-30 Minuteman III fleet, which
18 remains on high alert 24/7, as a prompt and highly
19 responsive retaliatory force.

20 The cornerstone of the future bomber force, the B-21,
21 is in its flight test campaign with the physical production
22 and advancing daily. This progress was further evidenced by
23 the award of two additional Low-Rate Initial Production
24 lots, one in December of 2025, and another in March 2026,
25 and the first aircraft remains on track for delivery to

1 Ellsworth Air Force Base in 2027, with a planned fleet of at
2 least 100 aircraft, and a recent agreement with Northrop
3 Grumman to increase annual production capacity by 25
4 percent.

5 As the land-based foundation of the nuclear triad, the
6 department is firmly committed to ensuring Minuteman III
7 force remains safe, secure, and effective until Sentinel is
8 fielded. Over \$2 billion is allocated annually for
9 operations and sustainment, with crucial investments
10 continuing at the Little Mountain Test Facility to modernize
11 testing equipment that will also support the future Sentinel
12 program. The Sentinel program is advancing with clear
13 purpose on a path to its Milestone B decision by the end of
14 2026, and initial operational capability in the early 2030s.

15 Key milestones achieved to date include taking the
16 first Minuteman silo offline for transition in summer of
17 2025, assembling the first three-stage ground test missile,
18 and breaking ground on a prototype launch silo in February
19 2026. The first missile pad launch is scheduled for 2027.

20 The programs within the portfolio sustaining Minuteman
21 III, accelerating the B-21 Raider, and executing Sentinel
22 program are the bedrock of our Nation's nuclear surety and
23 sovereignty, and the successful and timely execution of
24 these efforts sends an unequivocal message to our
25 adversaries and allies of the United States.

1 I thank you again for the opportunity to testify and
2 look forward to your questions.

3 [The prepared statement of General White follows:]

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1 Senator Fischer: Thank you, General.

2 Next, welcome, General Davis. I appreciate having you
3 here today. We're ready for your comments.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL STEPHEN L. DAVIS, USAF,
2 COMMANDER, AIR FORCE GLOBAL STRIKE COMMAND

3 General Davis: Thank you. Chairwoman Fischer, Ranking
4 Member King, it's an honor to appear before you today
5 representing the men and women of Air Force Global Strike
6 Command. I want to extend my sincere thanks to this
7 committee and Congress for your continued support, and
8 specifically for your commitment to the Air Force's nuclear
9 and conventional long range strike missions.

10 This committee recognizes the existential threats to
11 our Nation. We face the unprecedented challenge of
12 deterring two peer-nuclear adversaries, China and Russia,
13 who both present possess modern and diverse arsenals, while
14 at the same time, North Korea continuously attempts to
15 expand and modernize its nuclear arsenal. The increasing
16 coordination among these rivals underscores the urgent need
17 for a capable, flexible, and modern nuclear force.

18 Air Force Global Strike Command provides our Nation's
19 combat-ready forces for nuclear and conventional long-range
20 strike. Our highest priority is to deter conflict and
21 should deterrence fail to win decisively. Today, that
22 mission is being executed at an ever-increasing operational
23 tempo. Our bomber force, consisting of B-1s, B-2s, and B-
24 52s, remain in high demand across multiple theaters.

25 Over the last year, the command has played pivotal

1 roles in military operations, including Rough Rider,
2 Midnight Hammer, Absolute Resolve, and, more recently, Epic
3 Fury. These missions have required long duration CONUS-to-
4 CONUS missions and overlapping bomber deployments. In
5 Operation Epic Fury alone, the Air Force Global Strike
6 Command conducted over 150 bomber sorties, 48 of which were
7 round trip from the United States. These missions were a
8 minimum of 18 hours in duration, with those from the U.S.
9 taking as long as 40 hours. We have executed every tasking
10 with precision and professionalism. However, these efforts
11 have come at a cost borne largely by our airmen. We
12 continue to deliver upon under ever increasing strain, and
13 we are operating on tight margins, and your continued
14 support is invaluable.

15 To meet these no fail missions, we must sustain our
16 current forces while simultaneously modernizing our two legs
17 of the nuclear triad, and the critical nuclear command
18 control and communication aircraft that connect them. This
19 is a monumental task that includes the replacement of our
20 aging weapons systems through the Sentinel program, the
21 fielding of the B-21, the modernization of the B-52, as well
22 as developing and delivering the survivable Airborne
23 Operations Center and the long-range standoff weapon.

24 Two of these systems, Sentinel and B-21, are deemed so
25 important to the future of national security that the

1 Secretary of War created the Direct Reporting Portfolio
2 Manager, who reports to the Deputy Secretary of War. In
3 this new position, General White with both Service and
4 Department of War acquisition authorities has significantly
5 streamlined and accelerated acquisition decisions, which
6 provides the responsiveness to field these systems on time
7 with the required capabilities. This unprecedented approach
8 will be critical to delivering these 21st century platforms
9 with the capabilities needed to stay ahead of ever-
10 increasing threats.

11 Nuclear deterrence remains a bedrock of our military
12 strength and is foundational to the defense of our Nation
13 and our allies. Our conventional long range strike
14 capabilities are equally vital, providing the President with
15 a full range of options to deter aggressions, and when
16 necessary, defeat any potential adversary.

17 Air force Global Strike Command, along with Air
18 Mobility Command air refueling aircraft make the United
19 States the only Nation with the ability to conduct worldwide
20 long-range strike missions anytime or any place. Of course,
21 none of this is possible without our Striker airmen. They
22 are our greatest strength and their dedication,
23 determination, and grit, often delivered in austere and
24 harsh environments, are the real key to these remarkable
25 capabilities.



1 However, Air Force Global Strike Command and the Air
2 Force nuclear enterprise remain at an inflection point.
3 Critical modernization programs have begun, and with stable
4 and consistent resources, we can reduce risk and build
5 momentum. We must continue to continue to safely and
6 securely operate legacy nuclear systems with limited margins
7 while fielding the new systems. Success relies, as it has
8 in the past, on the hard work and dedication of our airmen.
9 Today, I respectfully request your continued support as we
10 confront these challenges and continue to guarantee our
11 Nation's security.

12 Thank you, and I look forward to answering your
13 questions.

14 [The prepared statement of General Davis follows:]

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1 Senator Fischer: Thank you, General Davis.

2 Admiral Wolfe, first of all, I'd like to thank you for
3 your service, and it has been a pleasure having you come
4 before this subcommittee the last 8 years, 8 years, and the
5 information you've provided me as chairman of and ranking
6 member during that time has been invaluable. So, I thank
7 you for that, and you are recognized for your comments.

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1 STATEMENT OF VICE ADMIRAL JOHNNY R. WOLFE, JR., USN,
2 DIRECTOR FOR STRATEGIC SYSTEMS PROGRAMS, DEPARTMENT OF THE
3 NAVY

4 Admiral Wolfe: Chairman Fischer, Ranking Member King,
5 it is an honor to be here today. I'd like to thank Congress
6 for its continued support in providing the Navy with the
7 resources required to execute our assigned mission. I'd
8 like to begin by assuring you that the Navy's nuclear
9 forces, the bedrock of our national security, are safe,
10 secure, effective, and credible.

11 As the Navy Command that provides cost effective, safe,
12 and secure sea-based strategic deterrence solutions, SSP is
13 entrusted to provide cradle-to-grave lifecycle support to
14 three critical programs; the Trident II D5 Strategic Weapon
15 System, the Navy's Conventional Prompt Strike Hypersonic
16 Program, and the Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile
17 Program. These are three of our Nation's highest priority
18 acquisition programs, and with your support, they ensure the
19 Navy is delivering peace through strength.

20 SSP ensures the highest levels of readiness and
21 modernization of the Trident strategic weapons system. As
22 the most survivable leg of our nuclear triad, the ballistic
23 missile submarine force provides an unyielding foundation
24 for assured response against any adversary. That force
25 stands at a critical juncture. Decades of strategic

1 foresight have delivered an unparalleled capability. But to
2 maintain our advantage in the face of evolving threats, we
3 must build on these decisions, and prioritize the
4 modernization of our nuclear infrastructure and our
5 industrial base.

6 A strong domestic industrial base is the foundation of
7 a credible deterrent. Using resources authorized by this
8 committee, SSP is actively working to revitalize this
9 national asset, ensuring the timely production and delivery
10 of critical strategic weapon systems components while
11 fostering American jobs and technological superiority.

12 Our modernization needs cannot succeed without
13 investing in research and development, investing in the
14 critical skills for our workforce and the facilities needed
15 to produce, sustain, and certify our strategic systems. Our
16 infrastructure is also at an inflection point. Existing
17 facilities are reaching their 30-year recapitalization
18 windows as we enter into a once in a generation
19 modernization of both the Trident strategic weapons system
20 and our ballistic missile submarine platform.

21 Over the past year, the Navy has made incredible
22 progress moving forward with development of the sea launch
23 cruise missile nuclear as the program moves at an extremely
24 aggressive pace to deliver both a limited operational
25 capability and an initial operational capability. SSP's



1 mission strategic deterrence is critical to this Nation.
2 It's the foundation of the national security strategy and is
3 a top priority of our Secretary of War.

4 In order to accomplish SSP sustainment and development
5 missions, we must have trained skilled employees on board.
6 Systems do not design, test, and build themselves. People
7 do. Which is what makes our people our greatest asset. As
8 the 14th Director of Strategic Systems Programs, I am
9 honored to represent them, and I have absolute faith and
10 confidence in the safety, security, effectiveness, and
11 credibility of our Navy strategic deterrence due to the
12 proficiency and professionalism of these dedicated service
13 members and civilians who have made deterrence their life's
14 work.

15 The 15th director will inherit a legacy of proven
16 success that will enable the Command to grow and take
17 challenges we have not yet begun to imagine. With continued
18 congressional support and stable on time funding, our Navy
19 will continue to effectively defend our Nation and preserve
20 peace for future generations.

21 This will be my last time sitting in front of this
22 committee. I would like to thank you for your support of
23 SSP, and more specifically, your support of me during my
24 time as the director. You have allowed us to accelerate
25 these critical national programs. I am humbled and honored



1 to have been entrusted to lead an organization so critical
2 to our Nation's security. I'm proud of the work of my team
3 and I have accomplished over the last 8 years that I have
4 been director of SSP, and, indeed, across my 38-year Naval
5 service career.

6 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I
7 look forward to your questions.

8 [The prepared statement of Admiral Wolfe follows:]

9 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Admiral Wolfe.

2 I'd like to start with you, sir, with questions. With
3 the fiscal year 2026 NDAA, it directed the Department and
4 NNSA to provide a limited operational capability for SLCM-N
5 by 2032. How's the Navy working in order to meet that
6 timeline?

7 Admiral Wolfe: Yes, ma'am. Thank you for the
8 question. We're doing extremely well. We've taken on the
9 challenge. We've stood up our program office. We're
10 building the workforce in partnership with NNSA. We've
11 identified opportunities to do just that, accelerate where
12 we wanted the program of record to look at a limited
13 operational capability.

14 I couldn't be prouder of the team, the way they're
15 thinking differently about how we can get this critical
16 technology into our warfighters' hands even sooner than what
17 you've asked us to do. But I would say the partnership --
18 and we and the fleet as well, Admiral Steve and I at sub4
19 are lockstep in how we're not only going to develop the
20 capability, but once it's there, how they're going to catch
21 it and actually deploy it when the time comes.

22 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

23 Why is it important to have that? I always stress that
24 it gives the President options --

25 Admiral Wolfe: Yes.



1 Senator Fischer: -- but we have to move faster to get
2 the President those options.

3 Admiral Wolfe: Yes, ma'am, absolutely. You're
4 absolutely right. I mean, I think every option that we can
5 provide as a department and within NNSA to provide options
6 to our decision makers is absolutely critical, particularly
7 in this environment, as we've heard with not just one but
8 two strategic competitors. Everything that we can do to put
9 that capability in our warfighters' hands as quickly as we
10 can is absolutely critical.

11 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

12 Dr. -- I'm always used to Dr. Kadlec. Secretary
13 Kadlec, good to see you, sir.

14 Dr. Kadlec: Thank you, Senator.

15 Senator Fischer: I appreciated that your written
16 testimony included strong support for the SLCM-N program and
17 your comments on how it will, "complement our existing
18 capabilities and provide the President a persistent,
19 survivable regional nuclear presence without dependence on
20 host nation's." I strongly agree that the President needs
21 those options, and I look forward to working with you and
22 the Nuclear Weapons Council on this.

23 I also want to bring up another topic, NC3. How's the
24 department prioritizing that nuclear command control and
25 communications? And, specifically, how's your office

1 working with Services to ensure that they are appropriately
2 prioritizing that NC3 modernization?

3 Dr. Kadlec: Well, Senator, I would describe it as you
4 have in the past, that's the fourth leg of the triad. But
5 really, it's the first leg of the triad. It is the most
6 important piece of the triad that we have, particularly when
7 we consider just to connecting the sustainment of existing
8 systems to future systems, analog to digital.

9 So, it has the highest priority in my office. And
10 quite frankly, thanks to the reorganization that was
11 mandated by 1635, we've incorporated the NC3 office into my
12 oversight. And we have a very capable individual, Todd
13 Shriver, Dr. Todd Shriver, who's managing that, And we're
14 working through all these issues to basically get a
15 functional review of this, which was recently done at a
16 four-star level with Mr. Duffy as the assistant secretary
17 for acquisition, and we'll be taking it forward to a nuclear
18 decision forum, hopefully soon with our deputy secretary.

19 So, we think that this is really key in light of not
20 just the transition phase, but the evolving threat landscape
21 that we have to keep on top of this all the time. And we'll
22 be working with the Services individually and collectively,
23 as well as STRATCOM, which is the functional manager for the
24 NC3 enterprise.

25 Senator Fischer: Have you started working with the

1 Services at this point in time, or is that in the future?

2 Dr. Kadlec: Ma'am, we've started mostly at the OS
3 level and with STRATCOM. I was on the call today with
4 Admiral Correll talking about this issue: how can we bring
5 more focus to certain elements, particularly around the
6 future threat? But we will be working down to the
7 individual service level as well, ma'am.

8 Senator Fischer: In future conversations, we have,
9 could you provide me with some more information on just --
10 first of all, specifically what services and what their
11 focus is going to be with regard to NC3?

12 Dr. Kadlec: Well, just to, topically, I can just say
13 as far as TACAMO and Seahawk, obviously, with the Air Force
14 and with the Navy, with the development of the C-130Js.
15 TACAMO is, obviously, the Navy program, and Seahawk is an
16 Air Force program, but we are focusing on those two
17 particular areas as well as Looking Glass Next, which is a
18 STRATCOM Air Force program.

19 Senator Fischer: Right. Thank you very much. Senator
20 King.

21 Senator King: Thank you, Madam Chair.

22 I think it's worth commenting and noticing that
23 everybody said that they're part of the triad as the
24 bedrock, and I think that's a good way to look at it, and I
25 hope you-all continue to consider it in that way. Secretary



1 Kadlec, your position was created last year in order to
2 consolidate responsibility for nuclear policy. One of my
3 favorite maxims of management is, "One throat to choke."
4 That's you. And the whole idea was to consolidate and bring
5 together into one office all of these diverse issues of
6 nuclear policy.

7 I've heard rumors that Secretary Colby is building
8 another office within his office on nuclear policy. Is
9 there any truth to those rumors, or is that something we --
10 are we back to splitting things up again?

11 Dr. Kadlec: Senator, I'm not familiar with the room
12 that you're offering at this point, and I do know that I
13 work with and speak with Under Secretary Colby regularly on
14 these issues. He is co-chairing with Admiral Correll a
15 nuclear strategy review. I don't know if that sounds --
16 that may be --

17 Senator King: Perhaps that's the source of the rumors.

18 Dr. Kadlec: However, we're participants in that, our
19 office.

20 Senator King: That's what I wanted to follow-up.

21 Dr. Kadlec: Yes.

22 Senator King: Do you -- I guess the question is, do
23 you feel that the coordination, and cooperation, and
24 integration is working?

25 Dr. Kadlec: Well, it's like anything a work in



1 progress, but it is working, and we are advancing the cause
2 here in terms of trying to address these issues. I think
3 the nuclear strategy review is just a case in point where
4 we're advancing this collectively between STRATCOM, the
5 warfighter, and, hopefully, other COCOMs in the future, as
6 well as policy and our office in acquisition to bring this
7 all together into coherency that heretofore probably didn't
8 exist.

9 Senator King: That's exactly the purpose of your
10 office. So, pursue it with vigor, as they say.

11 Dr. Kadlec: Well, sir, it's a size 16 collar, so.

12 Senator King: All right. Just to advise, we've all
13 talked today about the importance of the deterrent in order
14 to protect the continental United States. But part of our
15 deterrent is our extended deterrent and the so-called
16 nuclear umbrella. My concern is that our allies may be
17 losing confidence in that commitment, whether they're
18 European or in Asia. I think that would be a great -- that
19 would be a strategic mistake of a high order because we
20 don't want more and more countries feeling they have to
21 develop their own nuclear capacity that would lead to
22 greater proliferation risk and other sort of destabilizing
23 risks.

24 Talk to me about -- and it bothers me. Let me put a
25 fine point on this. The unclassified version of the



1 National Defense Strategy did not mention extended
2 deterrence or our nuclear umbrella at all. Can you reassure
3 me that this is still part of a U.S. nuclear policy?

4 Dr. Kadlec: Senator, I can, and extended deterrence
5 has been a matter of public comments by Under Secretary
6 Colby, subject to Europe. And I think in the case of how we
7 vote with our feet, we do have nuclear weapons forward
8 deployed with our dual capable aircraft and work with our
9 allies in that way. So, that hasn't changed one iota, at
10 least in the current sense.

11 And I think the key thing here is what is sometimes, I
12 think, been confused with the idea of demanding that we have
13 a strong conventional defense with our allies in Europe and
14 in Asia to ensure that our extended deterrence provides a
15 backstop.

16 Senator King: But that extended deterrence should
17 still be there. We do not want every country in the world -
18 -

19 Dr. Kadlec: Right.

20 Senator King: -- developing their own nuclear weapon.

21 Dr. Kadlec: And it's been explicitly stated that it is
22 a policy.

23 Senator King: That's a separate issue, as I see it as
24 stepping up in terms of their --

25 Dr. Kadlec: Yes, sir.



1 Senator King: -- percent of GDP, et cetera. General
2 White, I know we could spend all afternoon on this, but
3 there was a Nunn-McCurdy breach in Sentinel. How are we
4 doing in getting back on schedule, and getting to a place
5 where we can have control of the budget and deliver the
6 project before those Minutemen age out?

7 General White: Thank you for the question, Senator. I
8 would submit to you that we're doing very well, as we've had
9 discussions numerous times. I think the progress is very
10 focused in a sense that a lot of the planning has been done.
11 The restructure will be done in 2026, and we'll enter the
12 Milestone B phase and get that completed statutorily, but
13 more importantly, getting everyone aligned on a vision of
14 what we need to do.

15 Cost estimation will be completed in the summer. We've
16 already gone through some of the requirements process with
17 some of the folks on the panel with here with me here today,
18 and then getting to a place like what we're doing with the
19 launch silo and actually having a prototyping effort that we
20 just started in February.

21 Additionally, we're also working on the missile side
22 and the ability to do our first pad launch in 2027. So, the
23 restructure is near complete. Milestone B will be done this
24 year, and then we'll have substantive process with
25 prototyping on the silo side, as well as on the ground



1 launch in terms of a pad launch for 2027.

2 Senator King: I hope you'll give some thought to the
3 structure of the contracts that are going to be involved.
4 You were involved in the B-21 project. Is that correct?

5 General White: Yes, sir.

6 Senator King: I think that's one of the most
7 successful defense contract missions we've done in many,
8 many years. And I hope that we can think about some of the
9 lessons learned there to apply to this project in terms of
10 sharing the risk on development, but having fixed price on
11 actual implementation. So, I think that's an important part
12 of how this proceeds.

13 General White: Yes, sir. And I think you'll find over
14 time, one of the first things I did was look deeply into the
15 acquisition strategy, whether it's the most effective
16 approach as we enter that Milestone B, and we go through the
17 process making sure we have the right structure in place,
18 that's going to ensure we're going to get the capability
19 delivered to our warfighters.

20 Senator King: Thank you-all. And again, Admiral
21 Wolfe, thank you so much for your work. And your work with
22 this committee has been invaluable over the years, and fair
23 winds and following seas, sir. Thank you.

24 Admiral Wolfe: Thank you, sir.

25 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Senator King.



1 Admiral Wolfe, can you provide us with an update on the
2 life extension program for the trident.

3 Admiral Wolfe: Yes, ma'am. So, we are on plan. As
4 we've worked through that, we're looking at what the right
5 architecture is going to be. We are actually looking at,
6 with funding that this committee has given us, looked to
7 accelerate that program, to figure out how we can pull some
8 of the testing to the left early. As I said in my opening
9 remarks, getting this new workforce trained, getting them to
10 learn how to do this business. So, that's where we're at.
11 We've gotten all the milestones to date.

12 Senator Fischer: So, it's on track?

13 Admiral Wolfe: Yes, ma'am. We are definitely on
14 track.

15 Senator Fischer: 2039.

16 Admiral Wolfe: Yeah. Well, so 2039 is when we deploy
17 the first weapon --

18 Senator Fischer: We are we on track?

19 Admiral Wolfe: -- on Columbia? Yes, ma'am, we are
20 definitely on track.

21 Senator Fischer: Okay. Thank you. What do you
22 think's the biggest risks so you can timely execute these
23 milestones?

24 Admiral Wolfe: Yes, ma'am. I think the biggest risk
25 is making sure that we get, as I said, the industrial base



1 back up to where they can actually execute this program at
2 capacity. And then on the government side, it really is
3 understanding all the testing that we're going to need to do
4 both from the pad and from the platform before we start
5 deploying in 2039. So, that's what we're focused on right
6 now, is getting all of that capacity and getting all of the
7 systems where they need to get so we can start testing.

8 Senator Fischer: Okay. Thank you. General Davis, can
9 you provide us with an update on SAOC program?

10 General Davis: Absolutely, Chairwoman Fischer. The
11 program is past Milestone B. It's fully funded in the
12 fiscal year 2027 budget. The team at Dayton, Ohio, is
13 working very hard. They've already acquired four aircraft
14 in engineering, manufacturing, and development that they're
15 converting into the new platforms. We're expecting the
16 first aircraft to show up at Omaha, which has been
17 identified as the main operating base in the early 2030s.
18 But that program is remaining on track, but, obviously,
19 there's a lot of work to do between now and that time.

20 Senator Fischer: Are you going to be able to prevent a
21 capability gap between NAOC and SAOC?

22 General Davis: Ma'am, we'll absolutely be able to keep
23 up and operating and in its current configuration until
24 then. It's a challenge, and it's a very expensive platform
25 to maintain. So, any actions we can take that move SAOC



1 forward, and we're looking at a couple of those, I think
2 will be worth the taxpayers' money. And once again, I think
3 the sooner we can recapitalize that, the better off we'll
4 be.

5 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

6 General White, you've been in the role for about 5
7 months --

8 General White: Yes, ma'am.

9 Senator Fischer: -- is that right? How do you think
10 the authorities that you've been given, how does that help
11 you cut through all the bureaucratic red tape. Are we
12 giving you what you need, what we what we hoped would
13 happen?

14 General White: Well, thank you for the question,
15 Senator. I would say a resounding yes. I would say just
16 some of the major acquisition decisions I've made in the
17 first several months, we've probably cut the time by 60 to
18 70 percent. A large reason for that is, as you've probably
19 heard me state publicly, is I don't have a very large staff
20 right now. At last count, I have 23 people, and the reason
21 I have 23 people is because there are thousands of people
22 working these programs, and what they didn't need is another
23 extended layer of oversight.

24 So, my staff is focused on expertise like strategic
25 advisor, which provides legal advice. I have an expert in



1 budget, expert in contracting, and I also have an operator
2 as my deputy, who is a former B-2 pilot and has experience
3 in Global Strike Command. So, that gives me the ability to
4 support these programs. As you know, I have a vast
5 experience in many of these. And so, I have the ability to
6 look in and see where they need help, number one. And
7 number two, to be able to expedite decision-making so that
8 we can deliver these capabilities.

9 And so, I would say to this point, the authorities, as
10 you well know, far exceed just acquisition, but they've been
11 a resounding success in allowing me to be able to have that
12 freedom of maneuver within these programs.

13 Senator Fischer: And back to Sentinel --

14 General White: Yes, ma'am.

15 Senator Fischer: -- how are you ensuring that we're
16 going to have a capable Minuteman III until Sentinel's going
17 to be fully deployed?

18 General White: Well, first and foremost, as you'll see
19 in the 2027 budget, we resource it. That's step one, and we
20 have done that. You'll also see an increase over time as we
21 start getting more ready to get modernization programs in
22 place to ensure that that system not only remains
23 sustainable, but in an area where it's maintainable. So,
24 we'll upgrade those portions of the system that we need to
25 along the way.



1 And so, you'll have my commitment and the commitment of
2 my team to make sure we continue that, and you'll see the
3 Air Force standing with me side by side on making sure we
4 get that done. So, there's certainly no confusion on the
5 importance of making sure it's maintainable, sustainable,
6 and online.

7 Senator Fischer: Well, I certainly appreciate the
8 updates that you give Senator King and myself in classified
9 briefings. Those are extremely helpful, and it only helps
10 instill confidence in the position you have, and that it is
11 working, and that we are able to move ahead.

12 For General White and General Davis, how are you both
13 working together, along with Admiral Correll, to ensure that
14 STRATCOM requirements are going to be met with all these
15 programs?

16 General White: I'll lead off and then I'll turn it
17 over to my good friend. I think first and foremost, and
18 it's just not Admiral Correll and General Davis, it's also
19 Dr. Kadlec. And so --

20 Senator Fischer: Sorry to have left you out.

21 Dr. Kadlec: No problem.

22 General White: The success of our ability to be --

23 Senator Fischer: We should throw in Admiral Wolfe as
24 well.

25 General White: You know --

1 Senator Fischer: It's his last -- it's his last
2 hearing.

3 General White: It's your last one.

4 Admiral Wolfe: We do work together, actually --

5 Senator Fischer: Yes.

6 Admiral Wolfe: -- in many areas.

7 General White: Yeah. And so, the idea is simply that
8 we operate a single mind, and we're very well integrated.
9 There's no gaps in seams. It's the first thing I said when
10 I came on board is my ability to -- for us, the four of us,
11 to work together on these major programs with B-21 and
12 Sentinel especially, is going to be the foundation of my
13 success.

14 General Davis: And I would say we have a routine
15 battle rhythm where Admiral Correll, General White, and I
16 get together every 2 weeks. I meet with Admiral White every
17 other week to discuss these programs. I would say past
18 that, I've had the opportunity to work with both General
19 White and Admiral Correll in previous jobs, so I have a
20 personal relationship with both of them as well. So, I
21 think that keeps everything flat and allows us to have frank
22 conversations about the needs of the program and to keep
23 moving this forward.

24 General White: The alignment at this point, I would
25 say, is as strong as it's probably ever been across all of



1 these different positions, and we have to maintain that to
2 be able to execute the outcomes we want.

3 Senator Fischer: Thank you. Thank you very much.
4 Senator King, did you have other questions?

5 Senator King: I just wanted to make an observation
6 because we're all talking sort of in detail. One of the
7 issues we're facing, and we're facing a difficult budget
8 situation, as you know. The deficit is now itself a
9 national security issue that's going to have to be
10 addressed.

11 The unfortunate truth is, though, that it's fallen to
12 the lot of all of us to modernize the entire nuclear triad
13 at once. Probably, in retrospect, we should have been doing
14 pieces of it over the last 30 or plus years. Plus, as we
15 heard previously, we're having to modernize the nuclear
16 weapon production as well as the triad platforms. I refer
17 to it as the pig in the budgetary python. It's a lump
18 that's moving through that. We're just going to have to
19 swallow in order to maintain the basic bedrock of our
20 national security strategy, which is deterrence.

21 Deterrence consists of capacity and will, and our
22 adversaries have to understand that we have both. And what
23 you're working on right now is the capacity part, and I
24 believe that's what's so important about the work that we're
25 doing in Sentinel, in the B-21, and also in Columbia.



1 So, I just I think it's important to sort of look on
2 this as a bigger picture in terms of appropriations and
3 expenses. This is not something that will continue forever.
4 We'll get through these new programs. It is unfortunate
5 from a budgetary perspective, we're having to do it all at
6 once, but it's nonetheless so critical to national security.
7 So, I want to thank all of you for the work that you're
8 doing.

9 Secretary Kadlec, I really appreciate the role that
10 you're playing. And be aggressive. Don't let them poach on
11 your authority here. Your job was created for a purpose,
12 and it's very important to have that central coordinating
13 function. So, thank you very much for your testimony today.
14 Thank you, Madam Chair.

15 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Senator King.

16 And I think it's important for all of you and also for
17 our committee as a whole to remind the American people that
18 the first duty of Congress is for the defense of this
19 country. It is for national security. And as all of you
20 say, the deterrence that our nuclear forces provide is the
21 bedrock of that security. Thank you for the important work
22 you do. Thank you again, Admiral Wolfe. Wish you well in
23 the future.

24 We are adjourned.

25 [Whereupon, at 4:53 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

